

Defense Industry Executives — Train With Your Government Counterparts

There's a Place for You in DSMC's Advanced Program Management Course

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Editor's Note: In the last several issues of *Program Manager*, you may have noticed ads soliciting defense industry students for our Advanced Program Management Course (APMC). In this article, we take a different tack. Recently, we conducted a roundtable discussion with several industry students attending our APMC 97-1 course offering. Let them tell you in their own words why the DSMC educational experience is an opportunity you don't want to pass up.

Recent graduates of a premier course, conducted at the Defense Systems Management College (DSMC), Fort Belvoir, Va., returned to their careers in the defense industry with a new understanding of the acquisition/procurement arena, as seen from an industry as well as government perspective, and a clearer vision of what the future holds.

Students completing DSMC's unique flagship course, the Advanced Program Management Course (APMC) say it's the one thing those in industry need to understand new streamlined defense acquisition procedures.

The Curriculum — Adapting to Political and Legislative Change

Since the end of the Cold War, the Department of Defense has changed the way it does business with its suppliers at a rapid pace. Defense firms find themselves faced with slashed business opportunities, new legisla-



ON APRIL 18, DSMC GRADUATED SIX INDUSTRY STUDENTS FROM ITS ADVANCED PROGRAM MANAGEMENT COURSE (APMC) 97-1 AT A CEREMONY CONDUCTED IN ESSAYONS THEATER, FORT BELVOIR, VA. PICTURED FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: GEORGE KRIKORIAN, INDUSTRY CHAIR, DSMC EXECUTIVE INSTITUTE; MICHAEL C. MITCHELL, LOCKHEED MARTIN CORPORATION; ROBERT J. MORRIS, PRATT & WHITNEY; R. PAUL NORMANDY, THE MITRE CORPORATION; ARMY BRIG. GEN. RICHARD A. BLACK, DSMC COMMANDANT; RICHARD L. PASCO, JR., THE BOEING COMPANY; LOUIS L. JOBIN III, ROBBINS-GIOIA, INC.; LEON F. SHIFFLETT, SIKORSKY AIRCRAFT CORPORATION; AND GEORGE MERCHANT, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, ADVANCED PROGRAM MANAGEMENT COURSE. (NOT SHOWN—MICHAEL J. LOMBARD, PRATT & WHITNEY)

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tion passed by Congress, and even newer DoD acquisition policies and procedures.

In a 14-week curriculum based on student-led and faculty-assisted small group exercises and case studies, the APMC takes the fog out of these changes with an in-depth study of integrated systems management.

Initially, the course sets out to teach students the integration of functional disciplines into the dynamic processes

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used to manage systems from the program management perspective, as well as the flexibility to reflect ongoing change in the defense acquisition world. Course eligibility presumes that students have a baseline knowledge of the Intermediate Systems Acquisition Course.

“The course was good at giving a good, overall understanding of the

way the government does business. I think particularly with the major changes that have been happening in the last several years with reform initiatives, I think it’s been a big plus,” one recent graduate said in a roundtable discussion with fellow students.

During the APMC, students explore in detail defense acquisition policy, with particular study in decision-making support systems, including contractor finance, cost/schedule management, logistics support management, funds management, manufacturing management, software management, and systems engineering management.

“Overall, I think it was a very good experience. Beneficial. At least for me, personally,” another graduate said. “I know a little bit more about the ins and outs of how the government actually works and goes about getting contracts out on the street...and the wickets they all have to jump through and the frustrations that they may encounter along the way to get there.”

Students from every spectrum of the defense industry attend the course; invariably, they say they learned as much from each other as from the faculty.

“This is an opportunity that is unparalleled in terms of getting to know the people in the acquisition chain who are going to be the next generation of leaders,” one student said. “It just seems industry is crazy not to be taking full advantage of that. We ought to have people knocking down doors to

get in here for that reason alone, as well as the technical understanding of the process that you get through readings and the curriculum and the integrated exercises.”

Students who finish the course not only meet the requirements (competencies) established by the Acquisition Management Functional Board for Acquisition Category (ACAT) Level III Certification in the Program Management Career Field, but they also enhance their abilities to perform successfully in future acquisition positions.

Networking, Communication, Sharing Experiences

Graduates say the course learning environment encourages student inquiry and responds to their individual needs, plus offers the chance to network with others in the workforce.

Students from both industry and government begin the 14 weeks with little understanding of the other’s viewpoint. By the end, they can not stop talking about the interaction aspect of the curriculum.

“As good as the faculty here is — the real learning takes place with the people that are out in the field now bringing their experiences to the classroom,” one said. “That was probably the biggest positive impact for me, interacting with other students, industry and government.” Fellow graduates agree.

“I think the interaction was one of the most positive things, between industry and government. You know, we get to hear their side of the story and they get to hear ours. You don’t always get that perspective and neither do we.”

Another said: “I can be a little more sympathetic to the program managers. I mean, once you understand their frustrations and what their needs are, you can...find ways to help them get their job accomplished and at the same time benefit you as well. It’s a win-win type deal for everybody.”

In order to emphasize the importance of developing integrated acquisition management teams in the workforce, students are organized into product/process teams, where they are expected to function during case studies and exercises.

That approach results in an unexpected benefit: enhanced communication.

"I think that, more than anything else, kind of highlights that to succeed out there in industry or government or whatever, or to have a program that's going to be a success, you've got to have people that know how to communicate with one another."

"The one thing I walked away with after going through the course work and the managerial development session was that effective communication is the key. Not just communication, but it's got to be effective."

The students praise the faculty, who are all experienced military or DoD civilians with extensive experience in defense acquisition.

"The professors here are pretty close to where the action is," one student said.

No matter what reservations or worries the students have at the beginning, they leave with a new-found respect for their counterparts.

"I guess I was a little intimidated coming here, and I leave thinking you guys aren't so bad after all," one said. "And I hope they have the same impression."

"...I had a very negative attitude about that whole discipline, that sort of touchy-feely stuff, and 'what can we do to make people feel good sort of thing,'" another added, referring to the managerial development segment of the course. "Honestly, MD was the thing I got the most out of in terms of understanding how other people address problems, how they articulate their views."

A New, Rounded View of the Acquisition Process

Since APMC is student-centered, some topics and lessons can be determined by the students themselves, if time and curriculum constraints allow. But the course work itself is unique, offering students field trips to the Aberdeen Proving Grounds Testing Center in Maryland, a GM plant, and even a brewery, where they get a real-life look at what they are learning.

"We went to a brewery and went through the whole process and found their pluses and minuses and where their problems are," a graduating student said. "It was a very good tour. A fun tour, too."

The APMC also focuses on the influence of Congress on acquisition policy and program management, even offering a chance to travel to Capitol Hill for a day.

Graduates rave about the independent study element of the program, in which students have access to the College's vast library of defense acquisition materials. Many also enjoy the Learning Resource Center, stocked with audio and video tapes that allow learning to extend beyond time spent on campus.

"You can pop a cassette in the car on the way home or take something over the weekend. I used the video cassettes a lot on the weekends. And so it just expanded your learning time."

All students say they take advantage of the extras the College provides.

"I mean, this was a lot more than 14 weeks in a sense because you can use the weekend time and travel time back and forth."

Electives on a variety of topics give students the opportunity to tailor time at DSMC to their personal and career goals.

Some students took advantage of a Wednesday morning study group

preparing for the Certified Professional Contract Manager examination administered by the National Contract Management Association.

"That was great in terms of preparing for the contracts certification," one graduate said.

Investing in the Future

Students in APMC 97-1 were eager to return to their offices armed with the new knowledge, perspective and experience, but blamed some industry executives of short-sightedness for not taking advantage of the APMC.

What is it exactly that precludes contractors from sending their mid-level managers to the course?

"Not getting any productivity out of that individual when he's gone. Not looking to the future. You know, 'What's that guy going to do for me today...forget about letting him go...'"

Students thought some employees themselves might be reluctant to leave their offices, worrying that the nameplate on the door might be different when they return.

"The industry has been in turmoil the better part of a decade as the procurement budgets have come down. There is a lot of free-floating anxiety out there, I think," one explained.

Students finishing the course, however, go back to the workforce understanding changes in the business that might take others years to learn without the class.

The graduates even agreed that the 14-week session held its own against executive development programs at prestigious colleges and universities around the country.

"I think the networking that goes on here is something that you lose [at a larger school]. And not only that, but I think the folks probably have said more than once that probably half the learning comes from you fellow students

and not from the instructors. Probably you lose that to some degree.”

So how do companies benefit?

“I think...understanding the way government does business, particularly in lieu of acquisition reform, there are a lot of changes...over the last couple of years. The guys who come through this are going to [know] the new way to do business,” a graduate said. “We have a more rounded view of how the acquisition process should flow and what to do to help it flow.”

The APMC is truly an investment in the future in a myriad of ways. Graduates come away with in-depth knowledge of the acquisition field, new contacts in industry and government, a better understanding of their counterparts, improved communication skills, and a fresh outlook on the future of defense acquisition.

“I think it’s motivating the workers who are willing to improve themselves,” one student said.

When asked what he would say to industry executives considering sending employees to the APMC, one graduate answered: “I’d talk to them about the technical aspect of the process that I have a much better understanding on. You’ve got 14 different segments that we, even in 14 weeks, got into, [in] pretty good depth.”

A fellow student noted simply: “This is the smart thing for you to be doing for the future.”

That’s where DSMC fills a vital need. Any defense industry executive interested in learning more about the defense acquisition management process, side-by-side with their military and government civilian counterparts, is invited to attend. DSMC waives tuition for eligible students. For APMC registration or catalog information on other courses offered at the College, contact Ruth Franklin, Council of Defense and Space Industry Associations (CODSIA) Registrar, at (202) 371-8414.

Longuemare Establishes Two Key Life Cycle Information Management Positions

To more effectively manage cutting-edge information technologies and better serve Department of Defense, industry, and general public customers, the Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Technology (A&T), R. Noel Longuemare, announced the establishment of a single A&T focal point for life-cycle information management processes across the A&T organization. Longuemare has designated Michael J. Mestrovich as the A&T Information Management Executive responsible for life-cycle information management program oversight. Mark Adams has been named to lead the recently created Life Cycle Information Integration Office (LCIIO).

Mestrovich is the senior executive representing A&T in all information management matters within the Pentagon and in the Department’s dealings with industry. He will provide guidance and direction in the Pentagon’s development of federal/industrial base interface and interoperability, electronic commerce, and integrated data environments.

In his capacity as director of the LCIIO, Adams will implement A&T’s information management life-cycle process to take advantage of emerging technologies and more effectively focus existing computing resources and eliminate redundancies. Mestrovich and Adams will co-chair an Overarching Integrated Process Team that will take a cross-functional approach that better utilizes existing systems to provide faster and greatly improved customer service.

Editor’s Note: Correspondent’s Memorandum No. 142-97, August 21, 1997, DefenseLINK News Home Page (<http://www.dtic.mil/defenselink/>).